

Some Personal History and Lifestyle Choices.

Cdr Michael Gibbons,JN

Someone asked me recently about living on a boat. In my wild impetuous youth, about 1966, I met some people living on a 47 foot schooner. I was honored to be invited aboard for a cruise from Key West to Miami and was the “official navigator”. Of course it was a simple cruise along a well marked channel but I had a great time. I vowed at that time that I would buy a sailboat and the only way I could afford it was to live on it. The boat was a sailboat by Erickson Yachts and at the time had the most headroom of any 26 footer. I don't remember the exact figure but it was about three inches shorter than me. I cooked on a two burner alcohol stove swinging from two gimbals on my counter top. I had no refrigeration and no steady source of ice. A water tank that held about 20 gallons with a hand pump on it. Add a thirteen inch black and white TV and I was all set. I lived on that boat for nine years in Newport Beach California. The last two years with my wife Karen.

We managed because we were young and in love and it was an adventure for both of us. We finally got to the point that we couldn't both move at the same time so we started boat shopping. I wanted hot running water and a shower, Karen wanted a galley she could cook in. We both wanted a fridge. We ended up on a 31 foot Mariner Ketch. It didn't have a refrigerator but I was able to put one in. A 19 inch color TV made it all worthwhile.

Living on a boat is very similar to living in an RV or any small space. Everything is built in and storage space is paramount. Tables usually fold up or make into berths, almost all boats have a “V” berth in the bow and bigger boats have a queen bed in the stern cabin. Galleys can be “up” or “down”. An up galley is part of the main cabin and you are living in your “kitchen”. A down galley is usually part of the forward cabin and downstairs from the main living area. In an up galley boat there is usually a head in the forward cabin and another in the aft cabin. Down galleys occupy the space of the forward head. Most of this applies to boats in the 30 to 45 foot range. Power boats usually have electric ranges and sailboats have propane. Nowadays an 8 to 12 cubic foot refrigerator with a built in freezer is common. The longer you live on a boat the more customized it becomes. I removed the electric range and installed a propane system because I prefer to cook with gas. I removed a section of built in settee so we could have room for a more comfortable chair. We have a built in electric heater for the main cabin while some boats use propane or diesel oil for heat.

In the winter it can be a very long walk up the dock to the car and back. Clothes are washed in the local laundromat and everything is hauled up and down the dock. When living on an anchor, power generation and use becomes an important issue. Large batteries, generators and inverters are a necessity. Wind or solar power is an option. You learn to watch your energy use pretty closely. You learn where the sewage pump out stations are located and which ones work and which don't. Sometimes you get altogether too acquainted with your sewage system.

I have learned to live without a “den” or workshop or even a large storage area. We don't have a sewing room or a computer room. You have to ask yourself what is

important to you and what you can do without. If you need a sewing room or a workshop you need a really large boat or a different lifestyle, it's all about what you need out of life. I enjoy the closeness of the outdoors, the unique lifestyle, the interesting people you meet on the docks and the feeling of independence you get from dealing with whatever comes up at sea, with whatever you have on hand. And... I always keep enough fuel to reach Canada when the fit hits the shan.

Cdr Michael Gibbons,JN